

Testimony from Representative Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (FL-26)  
August 3, 2020

On January 9, 2020, the Florida Congressional delegation received a letter regarding unfair Mexican trade practices from U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer. In that letter, he pledged to offer a solution to alleviate the pain felt by so many seasonal producers in Florida, and specifically in South Dade, in my district. It is vitally important that he keeps his word to my constituents, and that he does so in a timely and effective manner.

Florida growers, especially those in Miami-Dade County, produce some of the best tomatoes, squash, strawberries, bell peppers, okra and more, that this country has to offer. In Miami-Dade alone, growers generate over 250 thousand jobs and over \$18 billion in gross regional product. Our farmers feed families across the nation, and they do so year-round, including the winter months when the rest of the country's producers are largely dormant. Therefore, we, as a country, need to have their backs.

It is a well-known fact, however, that seasonal producers in Florida constantly face an uphill battle against Mexican producers that dump their produce on our shores at significantly lower prices. According to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service's report published in July 2020, since the year 2000, Mexican seasonal crop imports have increased by 551%, while Florida producers have lost up to 20% of their sales. This has had staggering and rippling effects throughout Florida's economy, leading to \$3.7 billion in total losses for Florida's economy, over 37 thousand jobs lost, and over \$2 billion lost in Florida agricultural sales.

Florida's farms are at risk. And when Florida's farms are at risk, so is our nation's supply of healthy fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately, the grim reality is only worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused many of our growers to leave fields-worth of crops to rot or were forced to plow them under. We simply cannot continue down this path.

I'd like to highlight a local farmer, Pedro Sifuentes, who grows squash and okra at his farm in Homestead, Florida. He said, "Every year I am affected by unfair Mexican trade practices. They have the same growing and selling seasons as we do, but they sell at much lower prices, and we are often squeezed out. In fact, I often lose money on the squash that I produce, and sometimes I lose my entire harvest! We need help, and we need help quickly." Pedro is just one of many farmers who is highly affected by the current trade practices.

Therefore, I urge the USTR immediately begin an investigation of Mexican trade practices and policies under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 to redress the unreasonable Mexican practices and policies that have caused unfair Mexican pricing and volumes in the US market, and resulting harm to Florida's ability to provide seasonal and perishable goods to our nation.